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ABSTRACT

The five-year Georgia Head Start Quality Initiative was founded in 1994 to provide training and technical assistance (consisting of monthly group training sessions and individual on-site consultation) for Georgia Head Start administrators as they pursue National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation. This document reports on the activities of the first year of the Initiative. The first section of the report, "Project Overview," describes the three phases of the Initiative: (1) self-evaluation; (2) design and implementation of in-service training and improvement; and (3) document preparation for NAEYC accreditation. The second section, "Participating Programs," describes the 29 Head Start and Parent Child Center programs in Georgia that were invited to participate in the Initiative; the project began with 7 programs. In the evaluation phase, each participating program conducted a self-evaluation followed by a two-day training session and supervised practice classroom observations. In the second phase, the data collected in the first phase were examined to develop specific program improvement plans and to determine program readiness for accreditation. The third phase, preparation for NAEYC accreditation, included preparing a descriptive program report, documenting staff qualifications, conducting and summarizing parent and staff surveys, and conducting classroom observations. A closing section, "Reflections," states that the outcomes of the Quality Initiative can be measured at two levels: improvements in the quality of programs, and successful completion of NAEYC accreditation. Seventy-three percent of classrooms that completed the second self-evaluation documented improved classroom practices. An appendix consists of a description of the Challenging Teachers Summer Institute. (TM)

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Quality Initiative Year One Report

Georgia Head Start

Quality Assist, Inc.
1996

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Accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has become the hallmark of quality for early childhood programs. Accreditation is a significant program credential in that it surpasses regulatory requirements and establishes a common set of professional standards that cuts across program auspices. Each year, the stature of accreditation increases and accumulates greater influence on licensing regulations and funding guidelines. NAEYC established an accreditation system that is inclusive of a broad array of programs and yet exclusive in its focus on high quality (Bredekamp, 1995).

The Advisory Committee on Head Start Quality and Expansion reported that while most Head Start programs offer high quality services to children and families, there is evidence that quality is uneven across the country (The Report of the Advisory Committee on Head Start Quality and Expansion, 1993). The Advisory Committee's report also noted that on-site monitoring has been a principal strategy to ensure the quality of services and to promote local accountability. Nevertheless, there is a need to strengthen monitoring and to more effectively link monitoring to technical assistance. The Committee recommended that consideration be given to alternative monitoring systems that

> *... rely on grantee self-assessment and outside validation; ... use of outside accreditation by professional organizations as a supplement to monitoring; and ... development of new structures to support quality ... that could help programs initiate self-improvement efforts and assess their progress.*
>
> (The Report of the Advisory Committee on Head Start Quality and Expansion, 1993, p 34)

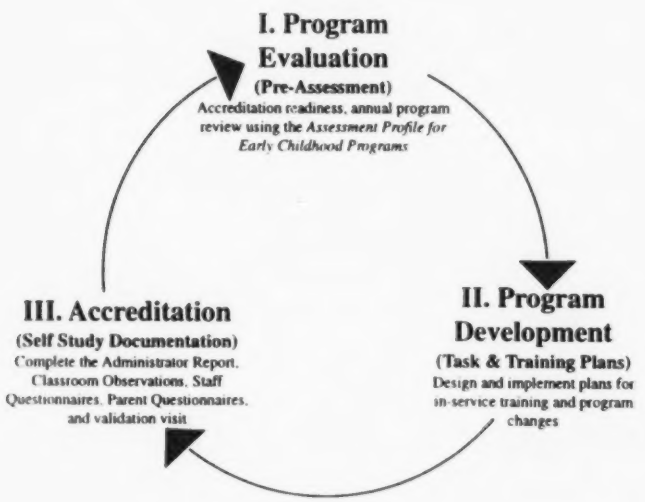
The process of obtaining NAEYC accreditation relies on grantee self-assessment and outside validation. The delineation of accreditation criteria that represent quality practices and the process of internal, self-study have become powerful teaching tools for staff at all levels. Accreditation is a significant supplement to monitoring and a support to program quality.

Despite the reputation that accreditation engenders, Georgia Head Start programs have been slow to initiate the process. As of July 1995, Georgia had 114 accredited early childhood programs but Head Start was significantly under-represented among these programs. Of the 29 Georgia Head Start grantees, only four centers from one grantee were accredited. Head Start has its own standards and monitoring procedures and, with few exceptions, programs are not required to meet Georgia child care licensing standards and monitoring procedures. The distinction of Head Start standards and monitoring procedures has contributed to the separation of Head Start programs from the larger early childhood community in Georgia. This separation has been accentuated by the recent expansion of the pre-kindergarten (Pre-K) program in Georgia. As with Head Start, the majority of Pre-K programs are not required to meet licensing standards. State-funded Pre-K programs will strive to be NAEYC accredited within the next several years. Because Georgia's licensing standards are low relative to other states and programs are exempt, NAEYC accreditation standards and procedures play an important role in cutting across program auspices and establishing a common language of quality.

In 1994, the Region IV Office of the Administration for Children and Families funded the Georgia Head Start Quality Initiative. This five year effort, will offer customized technical assistance to all Georgia Head Start grantees as they pursue NAEYC accreditation. This report provides a detailed description of the process and outcomes after the first 12 months of technical assistance.

Project Overview

The GHS (Georgia Head Start) Quality Initiative provides Head Start grantees with comprehensive training and technical assistance through monthly group training sessions and individual on-site consultation. The GHS Quality Initiative enhances grantee capabilities to conduct internal self-monitoring and to apply the findings to specific program development plans. The Initiative has been organized into three phases: I. Self-evaluation; II. Design and Implementation of Program Improvement and Training Plans; III. Preparation of Documentation for NAEYC Accreditation.


I. Program Evaluation
(Pre-Assessment)
Accreditation readiness, annual program review using the Assessment Profile for Early Childhood Programs
II. Program Development
(Task & Training Plans)
Design and implement plans for in-service training and program changes
III. Accreditation
(Self Study Documentation)
Complete the Administrator Report, Classroom Observations, Staff Questionnaires, Parent Questionnaires, and validation visit

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Phase I: Program Evaluation. Administrators complete a systematic, in-depth program evaluation using the *Assessment Profile for Early Childhood Programs*. The *Assessment Profile* is an observational, structured inventory of developmentally appropriate practices and is used diagnostically to determine program improvement needs and to identify specific directions for program training. On-site technical assistance is available to support administrator's self-assessment observations.

Phase II: Design and Implementation of Program Improvement and Training Plans. Administrators summarize program evaluation findings, interpret findings, and develop a program-specific task and training plan. The task and training plan includes identification of appropriate community training resources and projected timelines for completion of program changes and training. Technical assistance provides individualized guidance in the development, scheduling and implementation of program task and training plans.

Phase III: Preparation for NAEYC Accreditation. Administrators are guided through the process of documenting program changes and completion of the NAEYC accreditation program documentation. Technical assistance provides individualized guidance in the organization, scheduling, and implementation of the accreditation tasks including classroom observation, preparation of administrative documentation, and gathering and summarizing staff and parent questionnaires.

In the spring of 1995, project participants conducted program self-evaluations (Phase I) and designed program improvement and training plans (Phase II). Implementation of those plans began in the spring and continued throughout the summer and fall of 1995. During the fall of 1995, the first group of participating programs conducted follow-up self-evaluations in selected classrooms and began to prepare the NAEYC accreditation documentation (Phase III), while a second cohort initiated the preliminary self-evaluations of Phase I.

Participating Programs

In November, 1994, all 29 Head Start and Parent Child Center programs in Georgia were notified of the GHS Quality Initiative and were invited to apply for participation. Nineteen programs submitted applications expressing a commitment to work towards accreditation. Selection criteria were established to achieve a diverse representation of programs across the state. The selected programs varied by geographic location, program size, and ages of the children served. The GHS Quality Initiative began working with the first cohort of seven programs in January, 1995.

Participating programs served approximately 3,000 children from predominantly rural and suburban areas in 27 counties in north, central, and southwestern Georgia. The number of sites per program ranged from 1 to 13. The number of classrooms per program ranged from 4 to 51, with a total of 155 classrooms and 308 teachers and assistant teachers. Six of the programs served three and four year old children. One program was a Parent Child Center serving children from birth to three years of age.

Each of the seven program directors selected a team of representatives to participate in the GHS Quality Initiative training. The self-assessment teams included directors, assistant directors, component coordinators, center supervisors, and teachers.

Phase I: Program Evaluation

During Phase I of the GHS Quality Initiative, each of the seven programs conducted a comprehensive self-evaluation using the *Assessment Profile for Early Childhood Programs* (Abbott-Shim & Sibley, 1987). The *Assessment Profile* provides a framework for program representatives to systematically review their programs at both the classroom and administrative levels.

The administration component of the *Assessment Profile* addresses program level issues in five dimensions that include Physical Facilities, Food Service, Program Management, Personnel, and Program Development. The *Assessment Profile* for Preschool classrooms includes six dimensions that address Safety and Health, Learning Environment, Scheduling, Curriculum, Interacting, and Individualizing. In addition to the component for classrooms serving preschool-age children, the *Assessment Profile* contains other components that focus on the specific needs of infants, toddlers, and school-age children.

The classroom components of the *Assessment Profile* consist of structured inventories of developmentally appropriate early childhood practices. The instrument is designed to capture aspects of the caregiving and educational experience from the child's perspective. Therefore, the *Assessment Profile* emphasizes the provision of individualized care and developmentally appropriate learning experiences. Items focus on observable evidence of classroom practices and documentation, relying on teacher report only as needed for clarification or elaboration.

The programs participating in the GHS Quality Initiative used the *Assessment Profile* for preliminary self-evaluation in lieu of the accreditation self-study materials. While the *Assessment Profile* items are consistent with the NAEYC accreditation criteria, the *Assessment Profile* items are more specific and uniform in format than the accreditation self-study criteria. In addition, the *Assessment Profile* data can be easily summarized, consolidated across program sites and across programs, and used to develop individualized program improvement plans and training plans that are coordinated across programs.

All of the participating programs completed the Preschool and Administration components of the *Assessment Profile*. In addition, the Parent Child Center conducted classroom observations with the Infant and Toddler components of the *Assessment Profile*.

Training and Data Collection

In January and February of 1995, each program's self-assessment team participated in a two-day training session. This training included a detailed discussion of the *Assessment Profile*, followed by supervised practice classroom observations. During the practice sessions, each participant independently completed the *Assessment Profile*, compared results with a training partner, and discussed differences to clarify the meaning of specific items. Practice observations continued with a rotation to new classrooms until a minimum of 85% agreement was established. Following the training, the participants returned to their respective programs to complete self-assessments.

Prior to conducting the actual classroom observations, the self-assessment teams held staff meetings to inform the teachers of the nature and purpose of the program evaluation. Each team was asked to develop its own statement of purpose for the self-assessment process and to share it with the teachers. These statements emphasized that

the purpose of the self-evaluation was to identify program strengths and shortcomings, to determine program readiness for accreditation, and to use the findings to guide program development. To minimize the mystery of evaluation, teachers had an opportunity to review the *Assessment Profile* before the observations began.

Classroom observations generally occurred between 8:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m. Observers rotated among classrooms in 15 to 20 minute cycles to obtain early, mid, and late morning observations. A minimum of 60 minutes of observation was completed per classroom. This was followed by brief interviews with the lead teacher from each classroom to review sample classroom documents and to clarify information obtained via observation.

Scoring

Items on the *Assessment Profile* are scored "yes" if observed or "no" if not observed or not observed with consistency. Data are reported as a percentage of positively observed criteria in each of dimension. For example, if a classroom scored "yes" on 36 out of a possible 42 items for Learning Environment, the percentage of positively observed criteria was 86. Scores are not summed across dimensions because descriptive information is more useful in developing a detailed program improvement plan. The data were summarized by site and by grantee to assist in the next step, developing plans for program improvement.

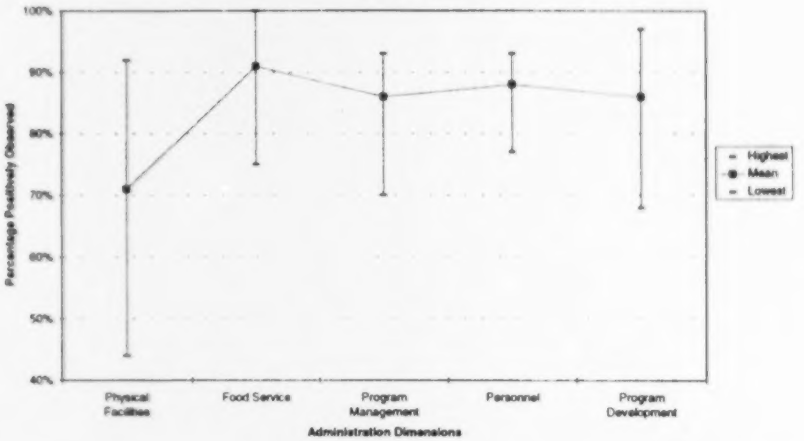
Phase II: Designing and Implementing Program Improvement Plans

In Phase II, the administration data and classroom data were examined for two purposes: to develop specific program improvement plans and to determine program readiness for accreditation. Classroom data from the *Assessment Profile* are summarized in this report for the participating programs, representing 30 sites and 151 classrooms. Complete classroom data for the Parent Child Center are not included in the summaries because the Infant and Toddler sections of the *Assessment Profile* consist of slightly different dimensions.

Administration Data

Figure 1 illustrates the average percentage and range of positively observed criteria on the Administration component of the *Assessment Profile* for all seven programs.

Figure 1
Self-Assessment Means and Ranges for Seven Georgia Head Start Programs
Spring 1995



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The areas of highest performance included Food Service, Program Management, Personnel, and Program Development. At least 85% of the criteria in each of these dimensions was positively observed. The area in greatest need of improvement among the participating programs was Physical Facilities with only 71% of the criteria positively observed. Although the average for each Dimension, other than Physical Facilities, is above 85%, the range of scores for each Dimension is considerable (40% to 100%).

Figure 2
Self-Assessment Results for
Seven Georgia Head Start Programs
Spring 1995

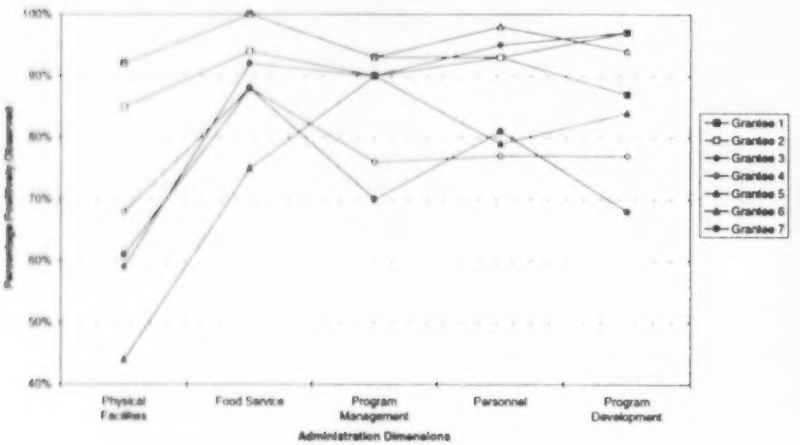

Figure 2 presents the Administration data for each participating program. Data from the programs with multiple Head Start sites have been averaged for this summary. Figure 2 illustrates the variation across programs. These data suggest that while each program has a unique pattern of strengths and weaknesses, there are some general trends among the programs. These trends are discussed in detail below.

Physical Facilities

Within the dimension of Physical Facilities, the participating programs had several areas in need of improvement. Nearly all of the programs needed to improve the safety of the outdoor play areas, prepare for emergencies while transporting children, and ensure that the physical facilities protect children's safety and health. Many of the identified problems required significant time and money to correct. For example, despite the fact that the programs used licensed pest control operators, the facilities were not free of rodents or other pests. In addition, most of the programs needed to ventilate the bathrooms and provide warm water at all sinks used by children.

Food Service

The dimension of strongest performance among the programs was Food Service with an average of 91% of the *Assessment Profile* criteria positively observed. The programs provided well-planned, nutritionally balanced meals. Children were offered a wide variety of foods that met their individual needs. The food preparation areas were sanitary and safe, as were the food handling procedures. One commonly overlooked aspect of Food Service was recording menu substitutions on the posted menus.

Program Management

Participating Head Start program demonstrated strong performance in the area of Program Management; an average of 86% of the criteria was positively reported. The programs maintained comprehensive documentation of policies and procedures as well as complete child and program records. In addition, the program administrators were responsible and systematic in their financial management. The Head Start staffing plans ensured that children experienced continuous, stable, and appropriate care. The group sizes and child/staff ratios were within NAEYC guidelines. The administrative staff ensured that the children's medication needs were responsibly met. Despite the Program Management strengths, there were several common oversights across programs. Several of these issues were easily addressed, such as posting notices and developing policies regarding staff illnesses. Others were more complex, such as maintaining comprehensive personnel records and complete documentation of dispensed medications.

Personnel

With an average of 88% of criteria positively observed, the Head Start programs handled Personnel matters responsibly and professionally. The programs were staffed by qualified individuals and provided comprehensive and systematic employee orientation. The agencies provided fringe benefits and maintained insurance protection for children and staff, as well as for the facilities. The administrative staff fostered cohesiveness and positive working relationships among teaching staff. Two common Personnel issues that needed to be addressed among the participating programs were providing staff with breaks and requiring annual health physicals for teachers.

Program Development

The Head Start programs performed well in the dimension of Program Development, as evidenced by an 86% average. The program administrators had systems in place for evaluating staff and for program evaluation. The programs offered staff job-related training and professional development opportunities. The administrators participated in local, state, and national professional and community organizations. One commonly overlooked aspect of Program Development among the participating programs was providing an opportunity for staff to evaluate the administration at least annually.

Program Improvement Activities

After reviewing the administrative strengths and weaknesses, each program developed a detailed task plan to address specific areas in need of improvement. The program improvement plans entailed simple tasks, such as purchasing first aid supplies, as well as more complex tasks, such as developing an effective system for maintaining the first aid kit. Other types of tasks included writing policies and procedures and making major purchases or repairs. Each task plan identified the person responsible for its completion and the target completion date.

Classroom Data

Figure 3 illustrates the range and the average number of criteria positively observed in each classroom dimension of the *Assessment Profile* for 151 of the Head Start classrooms.

Although the reported averages for each dimension suggest that the programs performed moderately well, there was wide variation in observed practices among the classrooms, as indicated by the range of positively observed criteria within each dimension. For example, an average of 86% of the Interacting criteria was positively observed across all classrooms, but in at least one class, only 21% of the Interacting criteria were positively observed. These data suggest that while developmentally appropriate practices were positively observed in many classrooms, other classrooms required additional support to meet the established criteria in one or more dimensions.

Figure 3
Assessment Profile Means and Ranges for
151 Georgia Head Start Classrooms
Spring 1995

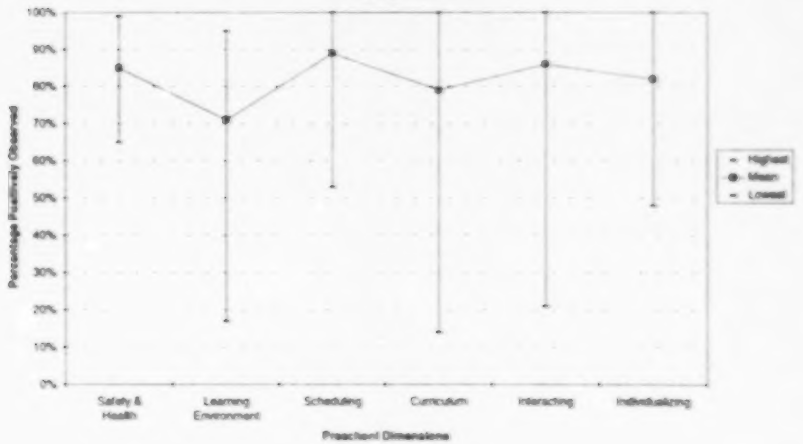

Figure 3 illustrates that, while Safety and Health and Scheduling were areas of program strength, the teaching practices most in need of development were Curriculum and Learning Environment. A detailed explanation of the training needs identified within each dimension follows.

Training Needs

The *Assessment Profile* data were summarized by classroom, site, and program. Each program team developed a specific plan for program development. Training plans that indicated the individual training needs for each teacher were developed from the classroom observation data. Site level summaries were used to develop a training roster to support planning and coordination of training efforts. Similarly, program level summaries allowed for coordination across sites in planning training and in-service activities. The data, summarized across six of the Head Start programs, are illustrated in Figure 4. This composite summary illustrates the extent of training needs, indicates common needs across grantees, and was used to facilitate the coordination of training activities across the state, as described in a later section.

Figure 4
Assessment Profile Means for
Six Georgia Head Start Programs
Spring 1995

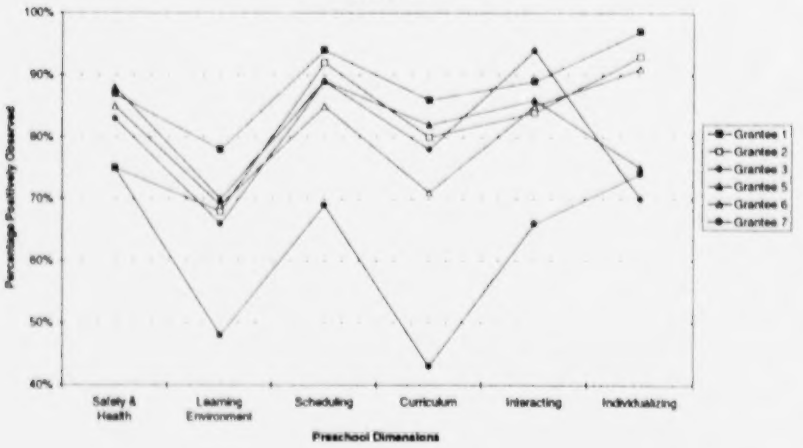

Figure 4 reveals the similarities and differences across the Head Start programs in six classroom dimensions of the *Assessment Profile*. The data from the six programs follow a similar pattern of strengths and weaknesses, with one exception: the dimension showing the greatest divergence was Individualizing.

Learning Environment

The evaluation findings indicated that nearly all teachers who were observed required training in how to create learning environments that support children's development. Observers assessed the outdoor learning environment for the availability of a variety of materials that encourage creativity and scientific exploration, social interaction and large muscle opportunities. The Teacher's level of involvement outdoors was also assessed. For 95% of the classrooms, the outdoor learning environment was under-utilized. Indoors, classroom materials were assessed for diversity, manipulative characteristics, volume, and organization. Classrooms were evaluated to determine the availability of learning materials and their accessibility to the child, in terms of permission to use them. Approximately 73 to 75% of the classrooms had limited availability and accessibility of materials to support children's exploration in specific learning domains. Specifically, many classrooms lacked sufficient materials for children to select and manipulate in the areas of science, math, language, self-help, nutrition/health, carpentry, and multi-cultural materials.

Curriculum

The second dimension in need of development across the 151 classrooms was Curriculum. More than half the classrooms (62%) needed training and support in using child assessments to plan learning activities geared to the needs and interests of individual children, providing opportunities for children to evaluate their own work, facilitating the expression and representation of individual ideas, and setting an individualized pace for completion of activities. Approximately 58% of the classrooms did not foster an awareness or appreciation of diversity among people. Specifically,

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incidents of stereotyping and imposing limitations due to gender or other physical attributes were observed. In addition, 50% of the classrooms needed additional support in identifying and utilizing a variety of teaching strategies such as: providing clear directions, demonstrating complex tasks, using questions that stimulate factual recall as well as analytical thinking, providing concrete and experiential learning opportunities, and providing children with receptive and expressive language experiences. Finally, 50% of the classrooms provided only limited opportunities for children to guide their own learning through comparing, hypothesizing, experimentation, choices, self-care tasks, and incorporating children's ideas into learning activities.

Scheduling

Scheduling was generally a strength across the Head Start classrooms. A majority of classrooms (85%) adhered to appropriate teacher/child ratios and group sizes. Classroom staffing was sufficient to allow teachers to implement a responsive and individualized curriculum. Most classrooms posted schedules that reflected a variety and balance of learning opportunities including individual, small group, and whole group activities; self-directed and teacher directed experiences; personal care; transitions; as well as active and focused activities. Posted schedules were not always implemented, however. Nearly two-thirds of the classrooms demonstrated a lack of balance and variety in the learning activities observed.

Interacting

Most classrooms were characterized by children's active engagement in social interactions and in learning experiences. Predictable, yet flexible, routines for meals and snack time were observed, and behavior management was positive and fostered self-responsibility and self-respect among children. However, for 61% of the classrooms, teachers were limited or inconsistent in their initiation of positive physical and/or verbal interactions with children, sharing a sense of humor, and responding to child initiated interactions. This suggested that the teachers needed guidance in responding to the child's developmental need for supportive interactions with adults.

Individualizing

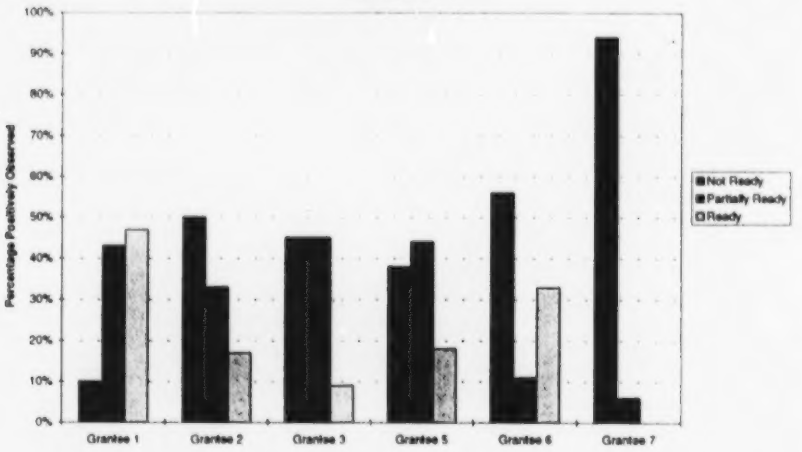
The data for the Individualizing dimension revealed the greatest divergence among programs. Four programs reported that an average of 90% of the Individualizing criteria were positively observed. Two others reported that less than 80% of the criteria were positively observed in their classrooms. In approximately one-half of the classrooms, a comprehensive child assessment procedure was not implemented and was not applied to curriculum planning to provide individualized learning activities.

Determining Accreditation Readiness

In order to establish realistic timelines for achieving NAEYC accreditation, the self-assessment data were summarized to determine classroom and program readiness for accreditation. First, the *Assessment Profile* data were examined to group classrooms into one of three categories: *Ready* for accreditation, *Not Ready*, and *Partially Ready*. The level of classroom readiness for accreditation was determined by counting the number of *Assessment Profile* dimensions in which at least 85% of the items were

positively observed. Classrooms that uniformly scored above 85% in all six dimensions or that fell below 85% in only one dimension were considered *Ready* for NAEYC accreditation. Classrooms that fell below 85% on two or three dimensions were considered to be *Partially Ready*, but in need of training in specific areas. Classrooms that scored below 85% on four or more of the six dimensions were considered to have an extensive need for staff development and were, therefore, categorized as *Not Ready* for accreditation. Figure 5 summarizes the level of classroom readiness for six Head Start programs.

Figure 5
Classroom Readiness for NAEYC Accreditation
for six Georgia Head Start programs
Spring 1995



Each of the programs had classrooms that were *Not Ready* for accreditation. Only 24% of the 151 classrooms were considered *Ready* for accreditation, while 76% needed additional training and classroom development. Of the 115 classrooms in need of training, 51 scored below 85% on four or more of the *Assessment Profile* dimensions, indicating they had extensive training needs.

As with the classroom data, the administration data were summarized to determine program readiness for accreditation. Programs were grouped into one of three categories according to the number of dimensions in which 85% or greater of the *Assessment Profile* criteria were positively observed. Programs that uniformly scored above 85% in all five Administration dimensions were considered *Ready* for NAEYC accreditation. Programs with one or two areas below 85% were considered to be *Partially Ready* for accreditation. The programs that fell below 85% on three to five dimensions were considered *Not Ready* for accreditation.

Three programs were *Ready* for accreditation at the time of the assessment. One program was considered to be *Partially Ready*, however, less than 60% of the Physical Facilities criteria were positively observed. The scope and nature of the improvements needed has slowed the program's progress toward accreditation. Three programs were considered *Not Ready*, indicating that they needed time to make extensive program improvements.

The administration and classroom readiness data were combined to determine the overall readiness for accreditation and the approximate time needed for program

development. Several of the participating programs were consistent in their classroom and administrative levels of readiness. Grantee 1 demonstrated both classroom and administrative readiness for accreditation. Grantees 4 and 7 were consistently *Not Ready* in both areas. Grantees 2 and 6 were *Not Ready* according to classroom data, but *Ready* according to the administration data, resulting in an overall *Partially Ready* rating. Grantees 3 and 5 were *Not Ready* in one area and only *Partially Ready* in the other, again, resulting in a *Partially Ready* rating. This information was used to determine a tentative timeline for accreditation for each program, which is described in a later section.

Training and Program Development Efforts

The composite summary of the preliminary self-assessment findings in Figure 4 revealed distinctive patterns of training needs across sites and programs. This composite provided a foundation for developing a coordinated training effort that addressed the specific needs identified through self-assessment. This coordinated effort was designed to avoid several obstacles to staff training that were identified by the participating program administrators. One such obstacle was finding time for additional training. By the time the self-evaluation data were collected and summarized, annual training plans and agendas had already been established. These predetermined in-service days were set aside to address training needs in the various Head Start component areas, not just education. Although in-service days are just one way to address training needs, staff training scheduled during the day requires classroom replacements, and training scheduled at the end of the day conflicts with teachers' other responsibilities. In addition to finding time for training, the distances between sites with common training needs limited the training efforts of some programs.

To efficiently address the identified training needs of the seven Head Start programs, a comprehensive, individualized training institute was developed. The assessment-based training approach emphasized the need to provide teachers with the same types of learning experiences that they are expected to provide for children.

In June 1995, Quality Assist received funding from the ACF Region IV office to provide an intensive training Institute for 150 Head Start teachers. A two day trainers' planning retreat was held one week before the Institute. During the week of August 7-11, 1995, the Challenging Teachers: 1995 Summer Institute was held at the Simpsonwood Conference and Retreat Center in Norcross, Georgia. Participants received 32 classroom hours of training. A description of the Institute is included in the Appendix.

The initial response to the Institute was greater than anticipated. While the Institute was funded to serve 150 teachers, the seven Head Start agencies which were invited to attend requested training for 205 teachers. Priority was given to lead teachers, teachers in need of training, and administrative staff. The final number of actual participants was 149 and included 138 teachers and 11 administrative staff. Of these participants, eight teachers were trained to mentor other teachers within their programs. While not all of the administrators were able to spend the entire week at the Institute, several of them participated in the training sessions alongside the teachers. Their participation was encouraged so as to strengthen follow-up training and support when the teachers returned to their own classrooms in the fall.

Follow-up Assessments

In the fall of 1995, representatives from five of the programs used the *Assessment Profile* to complete a full or partial re-assessment of their classrooms to determine progress toward accreditation readiness. This second round of data collection focused primarily on the classrooms that were most in need of improvement at the time of the initial assessment; classes that performed well in the first round of data collection were generally not included in the second round. At the time of this writing, follow-up data were available for 37 of the 155 classrooms in the original group. It is anticipated that several more programs will complete follow-up assessments by February, 1996.

A comparison of the follow-up data with the initial data is illustrated in Figures 6, 7, and 8, providing a graphic illustration of program change. In 73% of the classrooms that were re-assessed, substantial improvements were noted. By the time of the second observation almost one half of these classrooms had moved from *Not Ready* or *Partially Ready* to *Ready* for accreditation. Another 20% moved from *Not Ready* to *Partially Ready*. Approximately 20% of the classrooms declined in their performance on the *Assessment Profile* and 8% showed no change.

Figure 6
Head Start Grantee 6
Comparison of Pre- and Post-Assessment Profile Results

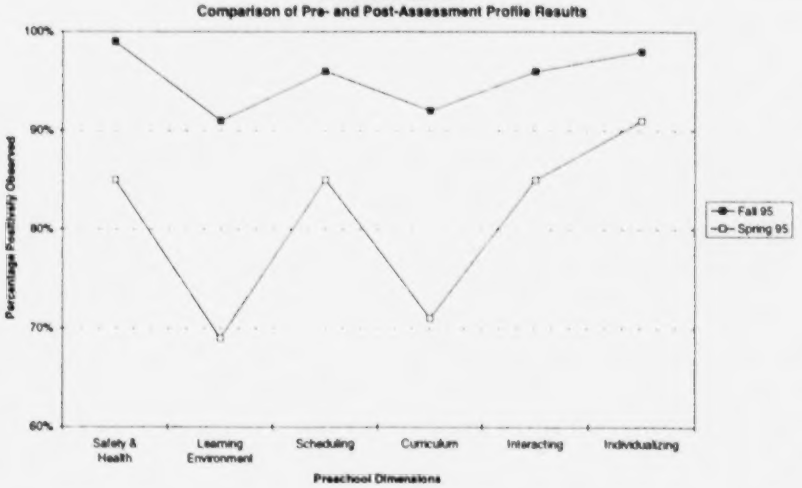


Figure 7
Head Start Grantee 3
Comparison of Pre- and Post-Assessment Profile Results

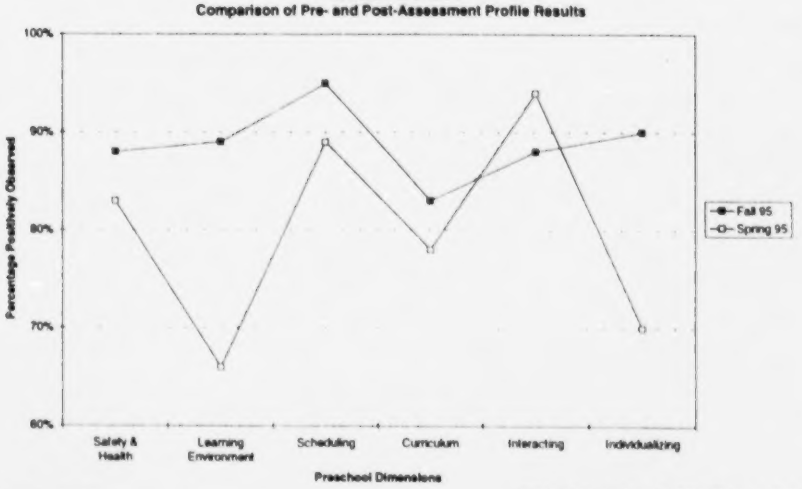


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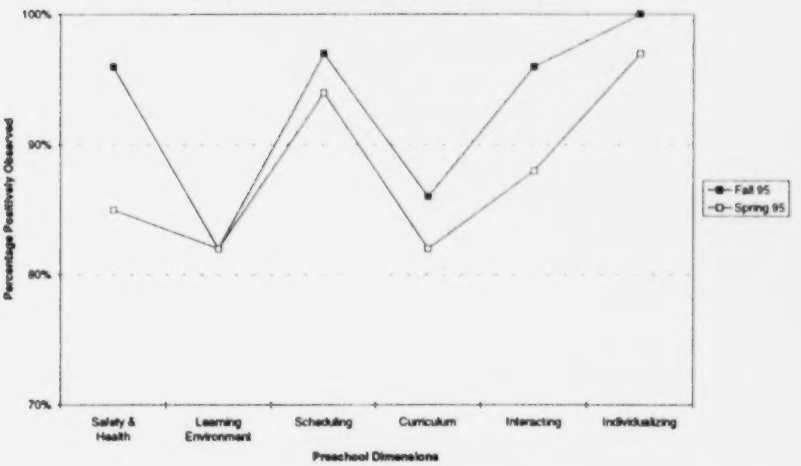
Figure 8
Head Start Grantee 1
Comparison of Pre- and Post-Assessment Profile Results



With few exceptions, classroom improvements occurred in all dimensions of the *Assessment Profile*. Re-assessment results indicated that one program experienced a slight decline in Interacting and another program experienced no changes in Learning Environment. The overall pattern of change is strong and positive.

Several factors account for the fact that nearly three-quarters of the group demonstrated measurable progress toward accreditation by the time of the second assessment. The process of self-evaluation raised administrative and teacher awareness and increased attentiveness to classroom practices. Self-evaluation findings were used to guide in-service training for individual programs and across programs. In addition, mentor teachers were established in six programs as another internal resource and support to classroom changes. Finally, establishing accreditation as a program goal created an atmosphere that unified staff around program quality and developmentally appropriate practices.

Phase III: Preparing for NAEYC Accreditation

Phase III of the GHS Quality Initiative involves preparing the NAEYC accreditation documentation of program practices. Three of the programs from the first cohort of the GHS Quality Initiative have begun preparing the documentation required for accreditation. The remaining four programs will prepare documentation for accreditation during 1996. Documentation includes: preparing a descriptive program report, documenting staff qualifications, conducting and summarizing parent and staff surveys, and conducting classroom observations with the teachers' involvement.

Several programs continue to face obstacles related to staffing and facilities that may delay accreditation. Two large multi-site programs will wait to submit for accreditation at several sites while they secure new facilities. In other cases, staff turnover will delay the accreditation timeline as newly hired teaching or supervisory staff become familiar with the evaluation and accreditation process. The projected timeframe for submitting accreditation materials to NAEYC is reasonable as substantive program change can take a minimum of twelve months.

Three of the participating Head Start programs are planning to submit their accreditation materials to NAEYC as early as the winter of 1996, as are several sites from a third program with multiple sites. Three other programs are expected to submit their documentation in the spring of 1996. The seventh program is not likely to be ready to apply for accreditation until the fall of 1996 at the earliest. In addition, several of the larger programs will seek accreditation for their remaining sites in the fall of 1996.

Reflections

The outcomes of the GHS Quality Initiative can be measured at two levels: improvements in the quality of program practices and successful completion of NAEYC accreditation. All of the programs in the first cohort will submit for some or all of their sites to be accredited during 1996. The rate of achieving accreditation is unique to the circumstances of each site and/or program. At the outset of the GHS Quality Initiative, it was anticipated that some programs would require more time than others. Therefore, among those classrooms identified as *Not Ready* for accreditation, the most meaningful outcome measure is an assessment of positive changes in practices. For 73% of those classrooms that completed the second self-evaluation in the fall of 1995, reassessment findings documented extensive improvements in classroom practices. Reflecting on the past year highlights three elements that contributed to program improvements and successful progress toward accreditation: coordination of assessment-based training, support for teacher professionalism, and administrative involvement.

The opportunity to provide an intensive, coordinated training program significantly contributed to the program progress towards accreditation. As previously noted in this report, the preliminary self-evaluation process identified extensive training needs and wide variation within and across programs. The evaluation findings indicated that both time and in-depth training were needed in preparation for accreditation. The supplemental funding for the *Challenging Teachers Summer Institute* and the Mentor Teacher Program were direct responses to these needs. The *Summer Institute* provided an opportunity to maximize resources through coordinated training. In addition, the *Summer Institute* provided approximately thirty-two hours of training in one week which would otherwise have taken from six to twelve months to accomplish.

Traditionally, Head Start has demonstrated a commitment to support the development of paraprofessionals. Head Start has relied on Head Start Performance Standards and the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential system to specify the technical elements of classroom practices, emphasizing performance-based competencies and assessments. Performance-based competencies have served as a beginning point for paraprofessionals. Yet, to achieve higher levels of professionalism, teachers must move beyond skill-based performance to a greater knowledge of child development and its relationship to practices. To effect substantive and enduring changes in classroom practices, teachers must have an understanding of the foundations that underlie these practices and of the complex interaction of the child's development, the learning process, and the learning environment. To design and fully implement developmentally appropriate classroom practices, teachers must understand the intricacies of developmental differences among children and how to create a responsive and supportive environment that provides for individual child needs in the context of a

group of children. Central to the concept of developmentally appropriate practices is the ability of the teacher to appropriately match learning experiences to the child's age and individual differences in development. The ability to "match" requires responsive, flexible teachers who know when and how to make adjustments in the environment and the activities to accommodate individual and group learning needs. Teachers must develop the analytical and reflective skills to be able to make these adjustments to classroom practices. The nature of teacher training at the *Challenging Teachers: 1995 Summer Institute* emphasized the teachers' learning process and encouraged teachers to construct their own knowledge through discovery and reflection. In addition, the Mentor Teacher Program recognized high performing teachers and supported these teachers in their professional development. Through the training, they increased their knowledge about adult learning styles and acquired the skills to support, or mentor, other teachers. Enhancing the professional growth of Head Start teachers is an investment in long-term improvements to the quality of classroom practices and to overall program quality.

Administrative involvement ensured that the accreditation goal remained in sight and that each preparatory step was completed according to the timeline established by the program. The day-to-day demands of program operations often delay progress towards accreditation. The level of administrative involvement and oversight of the program development and accreditation tasks has significantly influenced the continuity and timeliness of progress among the seven agencies. The active participation of program directors and/or education coordinators has been integral to completing the process of evaluation, implementing program development activities, and supporting teachers as they implemented changes in classroom practices. In some cases the initial process of evaluation training has further informed administrative personnel in the meaning and application of developmentally appropriate practices and in other cases it served as validation and affirmation of program practices. In both cases, administrative understanding and support of the classroom's competing demands and teaching practices facilitated progress with program development efforts and will subsequently lead to successful accreditation.

In conclusion, the commitment of the Georgia Head Start directors, education coordinators, and teachers to achieving accreditation is evident in the degree of involvement and follow-through that they have demonstrated. They have responded positively to each training opportunity, including monthly sessions, site-visits, *Challenging Teachers: 1995 Summer Institute*, Institute follow-up training, and mentor teacher training. Most importantly, they have implemented the tasks that were delineated and applied the training to improve classroom practices. The process of determining program readiness for accreditation, implementing program changes, and preparing the accreditation documentation is a lengthy and comprehensive process that requires organization, persistence, and diligence. The GHS Quality Initiative has served as the organizer and timekeeper. The Head Start program personnel have been the workforce. For a majority of the programs, the benefits of program changes will be a higher quality of services for children and families and the recognition of this quality will be accreditation awarded by NAEYC.

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Challenging Teachers: 1995 Summer Institute

Appendix

The *Challenging Teachers: 1995 Summer Institute* was conducted at Simpsonwood Conference and Retreat Center, located on 227 wooded acres along the Chattahoochee River. Simpsonwood's serene atmosphere provided a unique setting for learning, exploring, and discovering. Participants were assigned to one of eight training groups for the full week. Each group consisted of approximately 18 teachers with similar training needs, representing several different Head Start programs. This arrangement provided an opportunity for teachers to expand their professional network, form new friendships, and strengthen relationships with colleagues.

During the training sessions, the trainers modeled developmentally appropriate practices. This allowed teachers to experience and reflect upon the learning process from the child's perspective. The trainers modeled how to facilitate learning by allowing the participants to determine the course of their learning. The trainers, known as facilitators, asked open-ended questions, incorporated learners' ideas into discussion, allowed learners to work at their own pace and provided opportunities for discovery learning.

As with children, developmentally appropriate training for teachers means starting with teachers' values and beliefs and current level of professional development. During the training sessions, the participants examined the philosophies and beliefs that influence their practices. The teachers were provided opportunities to practice communication and problem solving skills. The facilitators helped the participants process, or discuss, the learning experience. Teachers were encouraged to make connections between the "here and now" experience and their regular classroom practices and interactions with children.

The facilitators had wide latitude to implement this training approach, based on their own comfort level. For example, several facilitators allowed the participants to set their own agenda and to select training topics from among the content areas identified from the *Assessment Profile* data. Other trainers planned the daily activities and content

areas for their groups. As a result, each group had a unique training experience. All facilitators, however, provided hands-on learning experiences in the form of cooperative experiences, creative activities, and problem solving tasks.

Several groups took advantage of Simpsonwood's outdoor setting to explore the natural environment as an opportunity for learning and growth. Some of the teachers commented that, since they do not encounter the natural environment on a regular basis, they did not feel comfortable during these activities. During a nature walk, one group encountered a snake; this incident generated a range of emotions among the participants, including fear, confidence, and excitement. By sharing their individual reactions, the participants experienced first-hand how various children might feel in an unfamiliar situation.

A complete set of early childhood classroom equipment and materials and a dedicated room were available to allow the participants to practice setting up a learning environment for children. Before approaching this task, participants discussed the purposes and goals of the early learning environment, and ways to achieve these goals. The participants had the opportunity to arrange the classroom materials, to review their work, and to get feedback from the rest of their group regarding their arrangement of learning space.

Documentation

Each group was encouraged to develop a means of documenting the training experience. Documentation took the form of journaling, photos, video and participant evaluation surveys. The options afforded by these various media allowed participants to record and communicate their experiences in personally meaningful ways.

At the end of the week, participants completed surveys to evaluate their Summer Institute experience. Although all comments regarding the training approach were positive, numerous individuals commented that the days were too long. Many participants reported that, as a result of the Summer Institute, they felt more confident in their classroom practices, while others felt motivated to implement new ideas. Participants also commented that they had expanded their professional network and that they enjoyed the many new experiences they had encountered at the Summer Institute.

Mentor Training

Eight teachers and three administrative staff participated in mentor training at the Summer Institute. The mentor initiative was funded by the Head Start State Collaboration Project to explore options for implementing a mentoring system in Georgia. The mentor training covered a variety of topics, such as adult learning styles, peer communication, and observation skills.

The union of the mentoring initiative with the Summer Institute resulted in several beneficial outcomes. First, the concentrated, intensive mode of the week-long Summer Institute allowed the mentor candidates to focus on learning while relieved of their usual job responsibilities. Second, the mentor candidates could meet informally with potential protégés to identify the teachers with whom they would like to work. The context of the Summer Institute allowed the mentor-protégé pairs to establish an initial relationship in an environment emphasizing professional development.

A third outcome of integrating the mentor training with the Summer Institute was the opportunity to promote the mentor initiative to the Head Start community and to explain the responsibilities of a mentor to Head Start administrators. The mentor initiative became increasingly visible during the Summer Institute as the mentor candidates took on added responsibilities throughout the week. For example, they played a natural leadership role in many of the extra-curricular events that enriched the Summer Institute. The administrative staff who participated in the mentor training learned how to support the mentors as they began to share their skills and expertise with their protégés.

Follow-up Activities

Despite the fact that the Challenging Teachers: 1995 Summer Institute was designed to provide comprehensive, individualized training, such an effort cannot be expected to meet every teacher's training needs or to prepare all of the teachers for accreditation. The directors, education coordinators, and center supervisors were informed of the need to provide follow-up support and training to further address the issues identified through the initial self-assessment.

Several additional follow-up events were planned to build on the Summer Institute experience. All of the participants were invited to attend the Challenging Teachers Reunion held in conjunction with the Georgia Association for Young Children's 1995 Together for Children annual conference in October. Teachers from two of the training groups were invited to participate in four days of additional training designed to explore in greater depth some of the training issues and strategies that emerged during the Summer Institute. The Georgia Head Start Collaboration Project has provided funding to further develop and implement the Mentor Teacher Program. Efforts are underway to organize a second annual Challenging Teachers Summer Institute for 1996.

Georgia Head Start Quality Initiative

The Georgia Head Start Quality Initiative is a unique training and technical assistance program for administrators. The Initiative guides administrators through a system of self-evaluation that is based on direct observation of program practices and is comprehensive and systematic. Evaluation findings are linked to specific training and technical assistance plans. Effecting substantive change in teacher beliefs, classroom practices, and administrative procedures requires time for both learning and application. The Initiative integrates a system of program self-evaluation into an annual work plan.

Involving staff in the process of evaluation has numerous benefits. The process of self-evaluation engages staff in a common program goal, stimulates dialogue about classroom practices, clarifies expectations, guides necessary changes, and reaffirms the importance of program practices. Self-evaluation renews commitment, builds program pride, and establishes program direction.

The emphasis of the Georgia Head Start Quality Initiative is to prepare administrators to complete a program-specific evaluation, develop a program improvement plan, and complete national accreditation. The Initiative is designed to provide on-going support at each step of the evaluation process.

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